

# Paths to Better Health: Community Design for Active Living in Rural Areas

Well-Ahead Louisiana  
Rural Health Workshop 2025

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# Speaker & Objectives



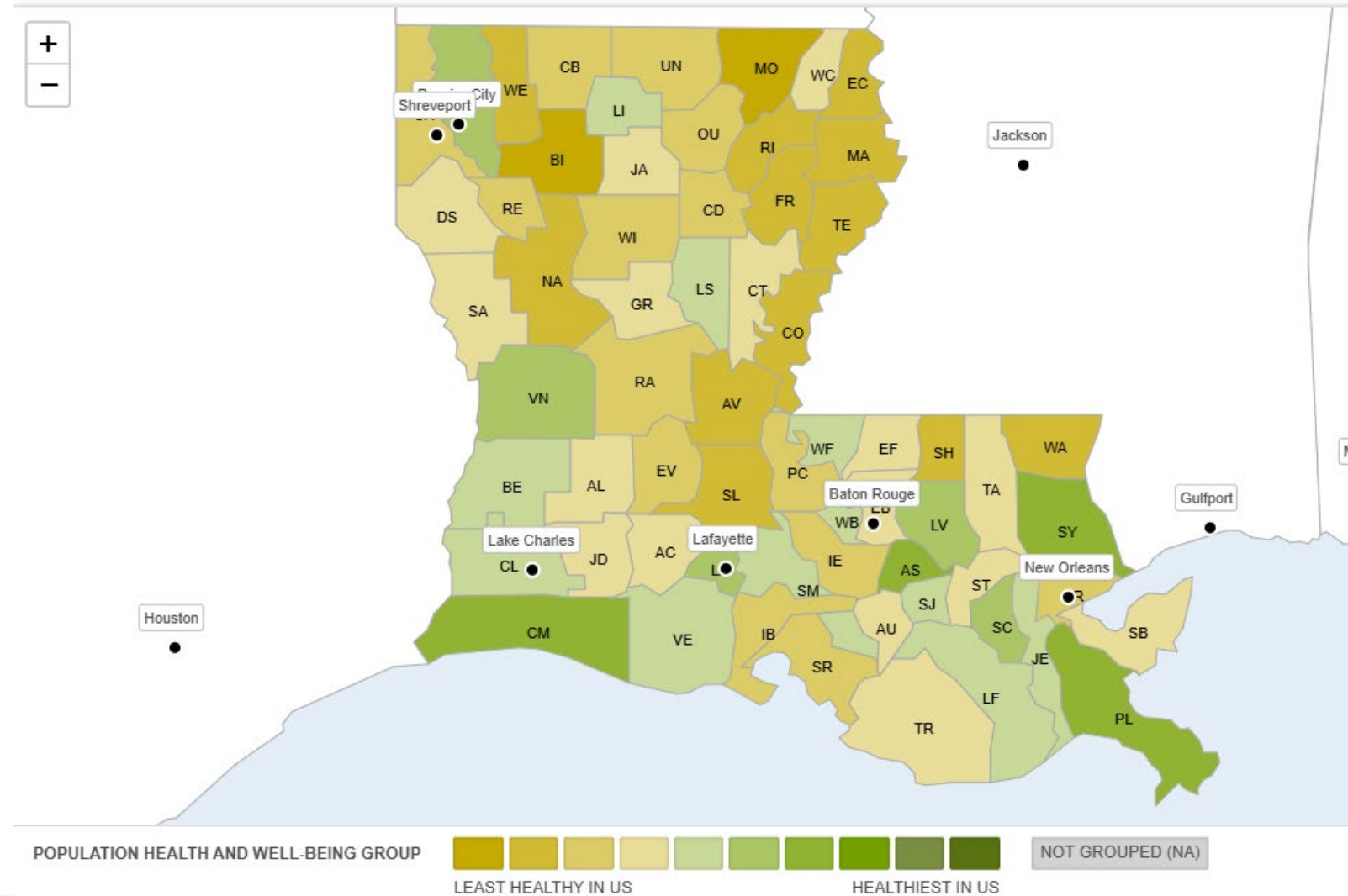
Joy K. Sims

Physical Activity Coordinator  
Well-Ahead LA SPAN Program  
Joy.Sims@la.gov

- Examine the impact of community design on physical activity and chronic disease
- Explore real-world examples of community-led design improvements in Louisiana
- Identify the role of healthcare providers in advancing community design

# Why Design Matters

1. If you did not have a vehicle or transit system, could you walk or bike to your local grocery store, library, or health unit? Why or why not?
1. If you wanted to exercise outside of the home or gym, where in your community would you go? Why or why not?
1. Would you agree with your parish ranking? Why or why not?



# Why Design Matters

In the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), barriers to health (BTH), are seen as those factors that prevent an individual, population, and/or community from acquiring access to health services and/or achieving their best health.

## Built environment

- No safe or connected places to walk, bike, or play
- Few or no parks, trails, or sidewalks
- Everyday destinations are too far or unsafe to reach without a car

## Active Transport

- Sidewalks and crossings are missing or unsafe
- Communities struggle to apply for or match funding
- Transit is unreliable, unavailable, or doesn't reach rural areas

## Health Impacts

- More chronic disease linked to inactivity
- Isolation from jobs, schools, healthcare, and food

# State Physical Activity & Nutrition Program

- ❖ **Nutrition – Food Service Guidelines & Produce Prescription**
- ❖ **Community Design for Physical Activity Strategy:**
  - Connecting activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations
  - Supporting communities with resources and education improving access to every day destinations and physical activity opportunities
  - Leveraging partnerships to influence policy and systems changes to support community design for physical activity statewide.
- ❖ **Breastfeeding Continuity of Care**
- ❖ **Early Care & Education**

# The Path to Change

**Policy:** written statements created and adopted by organizations, agencies, and stakeholders, and are intended to achieve specific health goals.

**System:** transforming and redesigning the practices and structures within organizations, institutions, or networks to promote better health outcomes.

**Environmental:** transforming the economic, social, or physical contexts in the lived, physical environments that affect health outcomes

## **Policy, Systems, & Environmental (PSE) Change at the Community Level**

- Address the root causes of health disparities.
- Reduce and prevent chronic disease risk by removing barriers to healthy choices.
- Expand access to healthy, active environments
- Provide long-term, sustainable changes that shift health behaviors over time.

# Building Active Communities



## Partnerships

- Leverage cross-sector collaborations—especially with healthcare, planners, and local leaders—to align resources and increase collective impact.

## Planning & Implementation Support

- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building to help communities move from vision to action, especially in navigating programs, policies, and processes

## Community Assessments

- Use locally grounded assessments to identify needs, assets, and disparities—ensuring design strategies are data-informed and community-focused

## Community input/engagement

- Prioritize authentic, ongoing engagement that ensures residents shape solutions based on lived experience and local context.

# Building Active Communities

Walkability Action Institute 2023 - Interdisciplinary teams prepared to pursue policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) support for walkability. Well-Ahead Louisiana provided funding for these communities to begin implementation of their action plans.

- Key Partners: National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) and The Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX)
- Five Teams: Bunkie, Sunset, Hammond, Abbeville, & Zachary



# Building Active Communities: LA WAI 2023

## Bunkie

### Action Plan Objectives:

- Redevelopment of a local property through community input
- Connectivity across railroad tracks

### Completed/Pending Projects:

- Sheppard's Park "Pocket Park" installation
- George Washington Carver Community Center Stakeholder workgroup
  - Upcoming Community Survey

## Sunset

### Action Plan Objectives:

- Increase access to physical activity throughout the community
- Increase equitable access to safe physical activity and promote movability through demonstration
- Minimize business access points in downtown business corridor.

### Completed/Pending Projects:

- Napoleon Ave. Demonstration and Survey
  - Sunset Herb & Garden Festival

# Building Active Communities: LA WAI 2023

## Abbeville

- **Action Plan Objectives:**
  - Adopt a Complete Streets Policy
  - Create redevelopment plan for downtown
  - Develop a connectivity plan for the city

## Zachary

- **Action Plan Objectives**
  - Develop construction plan to improve movability and green space
  - Update the city's masterplan to reflect inclusivity and accessibility
  - Conduct movability competition with the local schools to encourage physical activity

## Tangipahoa

- **Action Plan Objectives**
  - Adopt a Complete Streets Policy
  - Increase safe walkability for university students, faculty and staff who live off campus
  - Adopt parish-wide comprehensive bike/ped plan

# The Provider's Role in PSE Change

**Unique  
Perspective on  
Health &  
Environment**

**Bird's Eye View  
of Community  
Health**

**Connection to  
Resources &  
Networks**

**Clinical  
Credibility &  
Public Trust**

**Storytelling  
from the Front  
Lines**

**Advocacy with a  
Prevention Lens**

# Get Involved in Your Community!

- Check local social media for updates on community projects
- Seek out community workgroups or coalitions
- Participate in surveys and evaluations
- Louisiana Movability Network (Coming Soon)
  - Participate with your community
  - Join project workgroups



# Community Design for Active Living in Louisiana



- Poor community design can limit physical activity and fuel chronic disease
- Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) changes drive sustainable, community-wide health improvements
- Healthcare providers are trusted voices and essential advocates for healthier, more walkable communities

Questions?



# THANK YOU

Well-Ahead Louisiana | Louisiana  
Department of Health

Contact us: [WellAhead@la.gov](mailto:WellAhead@la.gov)

Please also feel free to visit the Well-Ahead  
website at:

<http://wellaheadla.com>

